- Stout, hairless, dull brown or gray larvae, ranging from 1/16 inch to 2 inches long. Examine the seedlings closely after nightfall, when the cutworms usually feed. But watch out—light and ground vibrations may make cutworms fall off seedlings onto the ground where they are more difficult to see.

Control

Before applying control measures, be certain that cutworms are the cause of the damage to your seedlings.

For chemical control, apply an insecticide, with diazinon, chlorpyrifos or trichlorfon as the active ingredient immediately. Follow label directions and make sure that the chemical is registered for the intended use.

You may also reduce cutworm populations by clean cultivation or other methods of weed control.

Pesticides used improperly can be injurious to man, animals, and plants. Follow the directions and heed all precautions on the labels.

Store pesticides in original containers under lock and key—out of the reach of children and animals—and away from food and feed.

Apply pesticides so that they do not endanger humans, livestock, crops, beneficial insects, fish, and wildlife. Do not apply pesticides when there is danger of drift, when honey bees or other pollinating insects are visiting plants, or in ways that may contaminate water or leave illegal residues.

Avoid prolonged inhalation of pesticide sprays or dusts; wear protective clothing and equipment if specified on the container.

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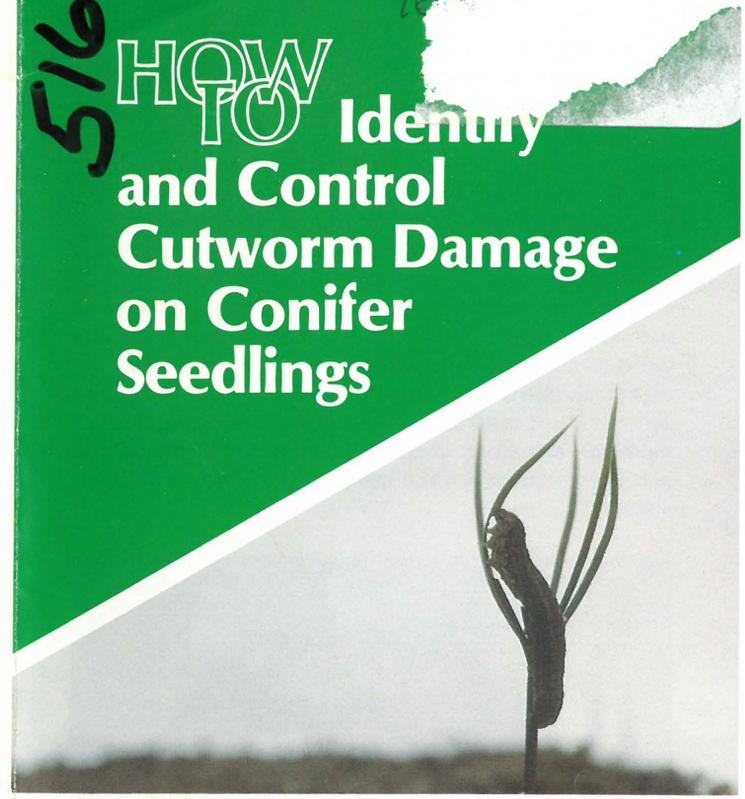
How To Identify and Control Cutworm Damage on Conifer Seedlings



United States Department of Agriculture

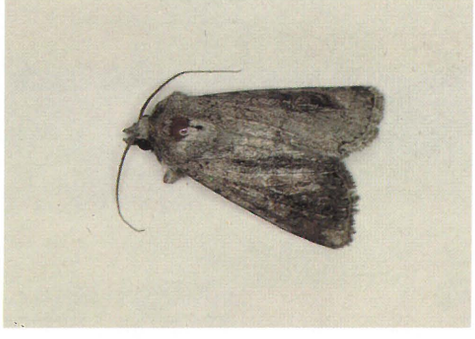
PREPARED BY Forest Service North Central Forest Experiment Station

Several species of cutworms attack seedlings of conifers and other trees throughout North America. A large population of cutworms can destroy thousands of conifer seedlings in a few weeks by feeding on the cotyledons, and needles of newly emerged seedlings. Regulated by the weather and other environmental factors, populations of cutworms seldom become large. But when they do, they can cause great economic losses, especially in nurseries containing 1-year-old seedlings.

Early discovery and control of cutworm can prevent such losses, but the cutworms and the damage they do are difficult to detect. Cutworms are elusive: they feed at night and hide underground during the day. Their feeding damage is not apparent without close inspection of the seedlings. Therefore, large losses can occur before damage is noticed, especially if the seedlings are under protective screens.

Life Cycle

Most species of cutworms produce only one generation per year. After the overwintering as larvae or eggs, cutworms begin to grow rapidly in early spring. Heavy feeding occurs during this time and continues until the cutworms pupate in early summer. The moths begin emerging in August and remain until the onset of cold weather. Then females lay eggs on the leaves of shrubs, grass, cover crops and other plants. Because they can travel overland, young larvae can move from egg-laying sites to adjacent seedbeds. Cutworms can thus become established in nursery seedbeds after soil fumigation in the fall.

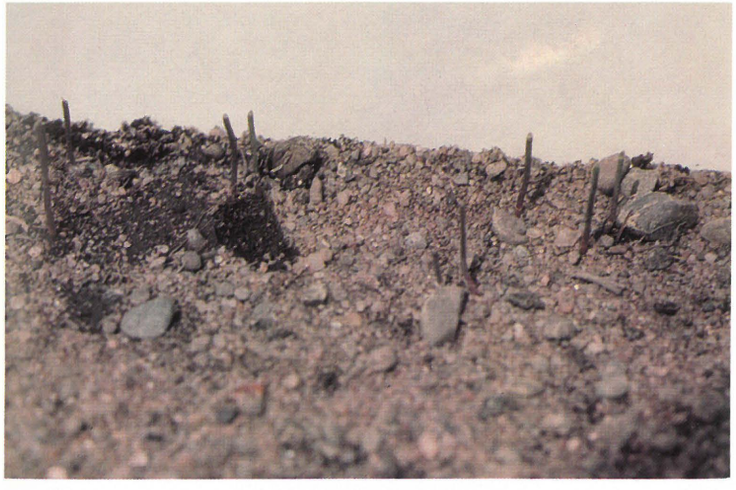


Identification

Look For:

- Cut or chewed cotyledons or primary needles,

- Needle-less stems,



- Sunken or depressed areas that look like fungal lesions—the sites of old damage from insect chewing.

Sometimes the cut-off stems of the seedlings will be covered with soil, as if the seeds did not germinate.

Some cutworms cut the seedlings off at the ground. Don't confuse this with damping off, a fungal disease that rots the roots and stems of seedlings, eventually toppling them over.